

We're a healthy nation

All in all, Australia is a healthy nation. Our people generally have good health, our health is improving on many fronts and it compares well with other countries in many ways.

Of course there are serious areas of concern that need to be tackled and there is great scope for Australia to do better. Those aspects will be covered in later sections. This section, however, presents some examples of the good news.



Outliving most of the world

Our life expectancy as a nation is among the highest in the world and has been so for quite some time. We ranked third in the world in 2007 for our life expectancy at birth: almost 84 years for females and 79 for males, on average.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 2

Life expectancy—how we compare



Longer and longer lives

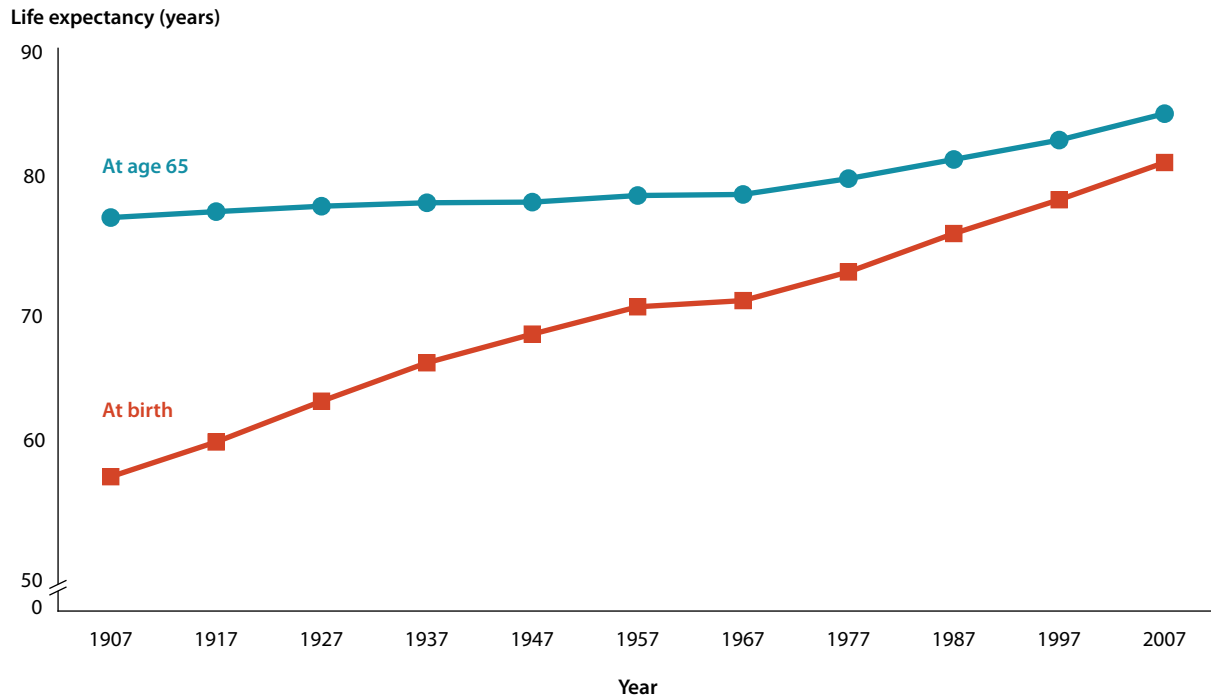
Australia's life expectancy at birth has risen dramatically over the past century, having been only 55 years for males in the early 1900s and 59 for females. In the last few decades there have even been big gains for older people. For those aged 65, males can now expect to live to around 84 years (the same as females can expect at birth!); and females to around 87.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 2

Australia's health 2010 documents how this great rise in life expectancy reflects falls in death rates for all age groups over the decades (although the improvement in the infant death rate has been fairly modest over the last decade).

Life expectancy at birth and at 65 years: trends



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Australia compares well

The 30 measures here help to show how Australia's health compared recently with similar countries, namely the 29 other members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Where one of our results falls in the right hand column it is among the 'best' (healthiest) third of the nations on that measure. The further to the right, the healthier our ranking.

Despite some notable exceptions, such as our obesity level and our infant mortality rate, we are mostly in the best third for this list. And we are close to the very best rankings in areas such as life expectancy, the death rate from stroke and adult smoking rates. Also, *Australia's health 2010* shows that our rankings for 23 of the measures were better than they were 20 years earlier.

Find out more:
[Australia's health 2010](#)
 Chapter 2

Australia's ranking among OECD countries



Heart, stroke deaths down

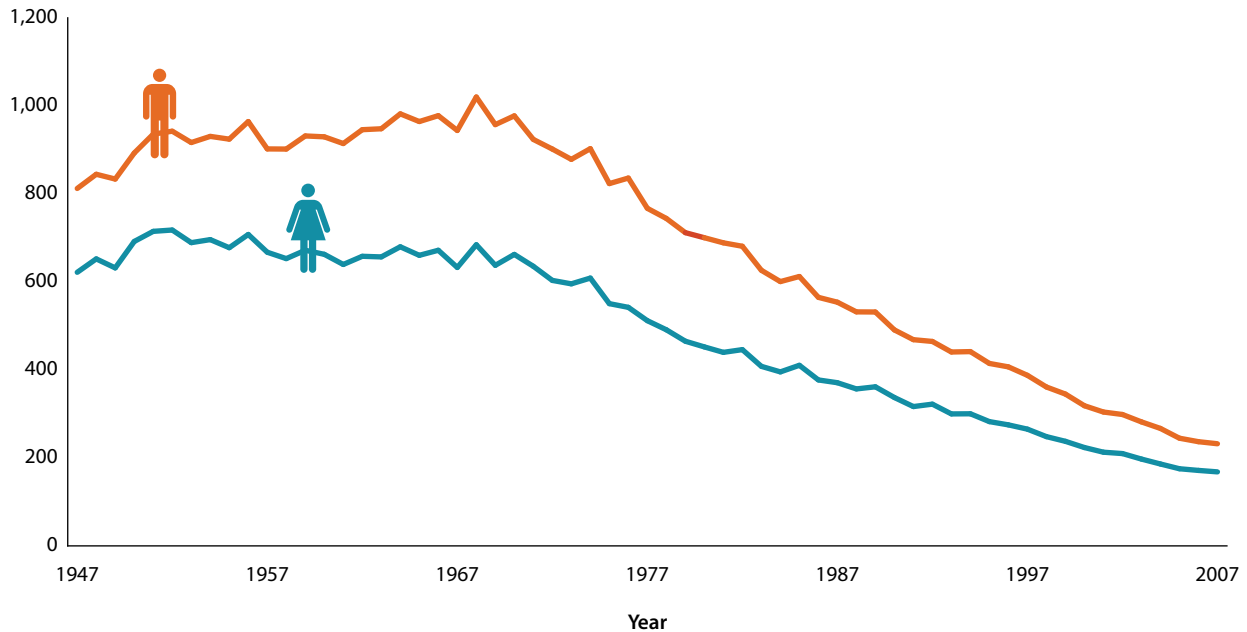
For cardiovascular disease (CVD) we have seen a spectacular 76% fall in death rate since its peak around the late 1960s. The rate is now much lower than it was at the start of the 20th century. As a group, CVD includes heart attack, stroke and other heart and blood vessel diseases. It is still Australia's biggest killer but less than a quarter of the deaths are now among people aged under 75 years.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 4

Cardiovascular deaths: trends

Deaths per 100,000 population



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Cancer deaths down too

Cancer death rates have also fallen, although much less than for cardiovascular disease and with the improvement starting later. Between 1987 and 2007 the overall cancer death rate fell by 16% and survival from a number of leading cancers has also improved (see later).

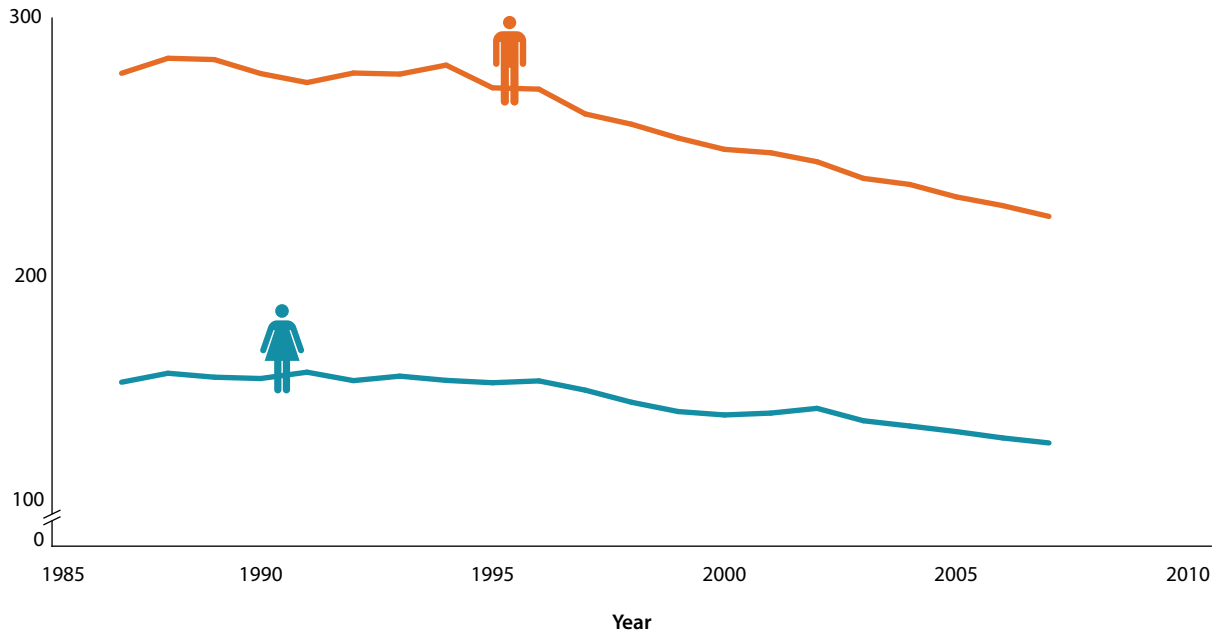
Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 4

Cancer now causes Australia's biggest burden of disease (see next section), having replaced cardiovascular disease around the turn of this century. This does NOT mean the situation for cancer has worsened, only that it has not improved nearly as much as for cardiovascular disease.

Cancer deaths: trends

Deaths per 100,000 population



Less emphysema with less smoking

Another major disease to show a fall in death rates is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), commonly known as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. The fall began much earlier for males but from a much higher level than for females. This is because male smoking rates had been much higher than those of females but they started to decline earlier. COPD is the main contributor to the disease burden from 'Chronic respiratory diseases', the group ranked fifth in Australia.

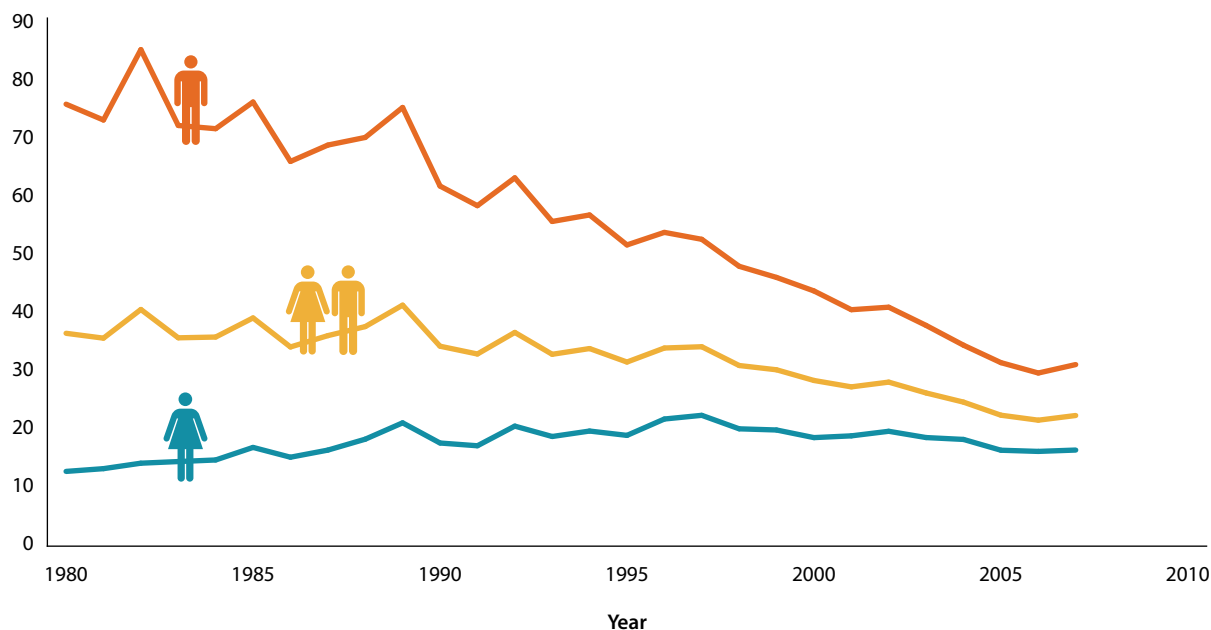
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Chapter 4

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease deaths: trends

Deaths per 100,000 population



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Breathing easier

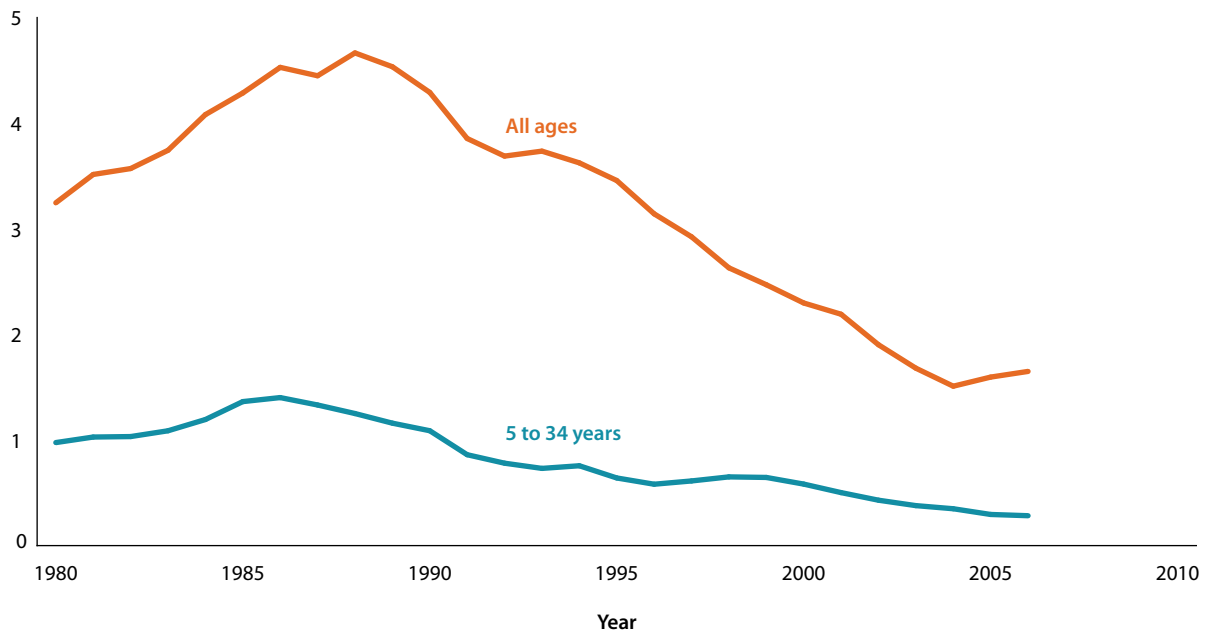
Asthma, another leading chronic respiratory disease, has shown a fall in death rate of about 70% since a peak in the late 1980s. The all-age trend appears to show a rise over the last few years, but the diagnosis of asthma is considered most reliable among 5–34 year olds. When this younger age group is examined there is a continuing decline in the death rate, amounting to over 85% since the mid- to late 1980s.

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Australia's health 2010
Chapter 4

Asthma deaths: trends

Deaths per 100,000 population (3-year moving averages)



Infectious disease deaths plummeted

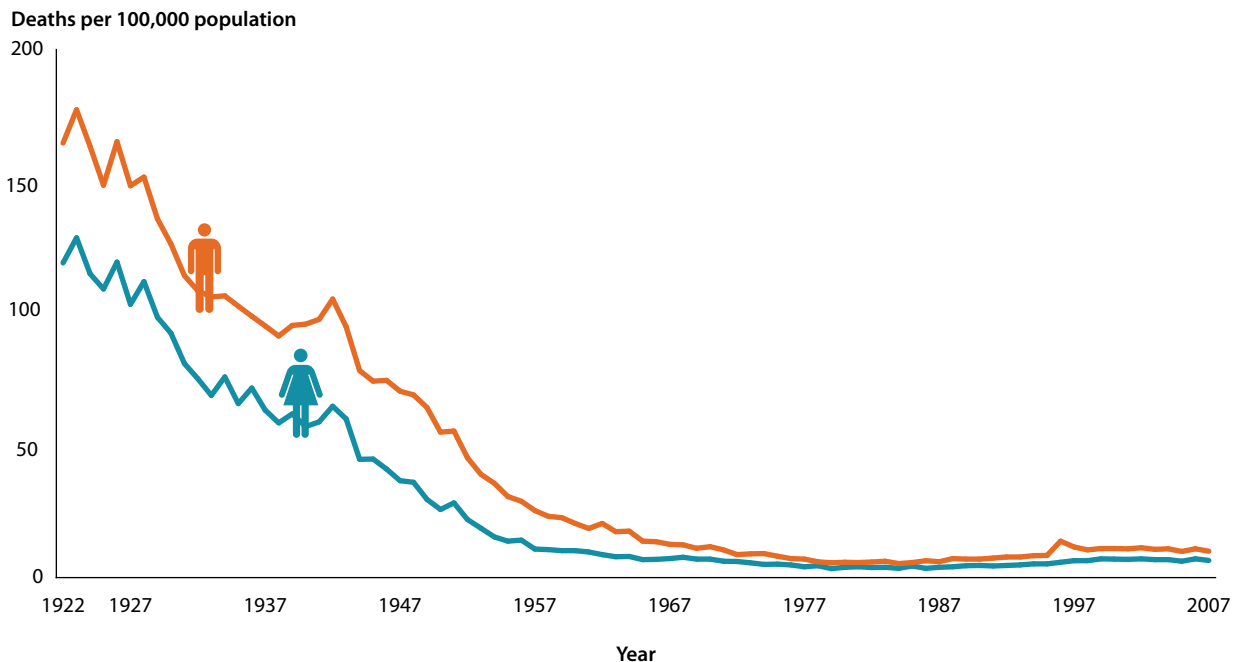
The most dramatic long term decline in death rates has been that of infectious diseases. Better living conditions and nutrition, vaccinations, antibiotics and other control measures have made a huge difference over the decades. The infectious disease death rates fell by about 96% over the 20th century, having reached an all-time low in the late 1970s of 0.5% of all deaths.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 4

There was an increase after the 1980s due to increases in deaths from septicaemia, AIDS and hepatitis, but the rates have been fairly steady since the second half of the 1990s. In 2007 infectious diseases accounted for little over 1% of all deaths, compared with 15% in 1922. The diseases are still very common, however, and often potentially serious.

Infectious disease deaths: trends



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Fatal injuries still falling

The overall death rate from injury has continued to decline in recent years, as it has for several decades. The recent decline was greatest at younger age groups, being about 40% for young people aged 15–24 years during the decade to 2005–06, 30% for those under 15 years and 33% for 25–44 year olds.

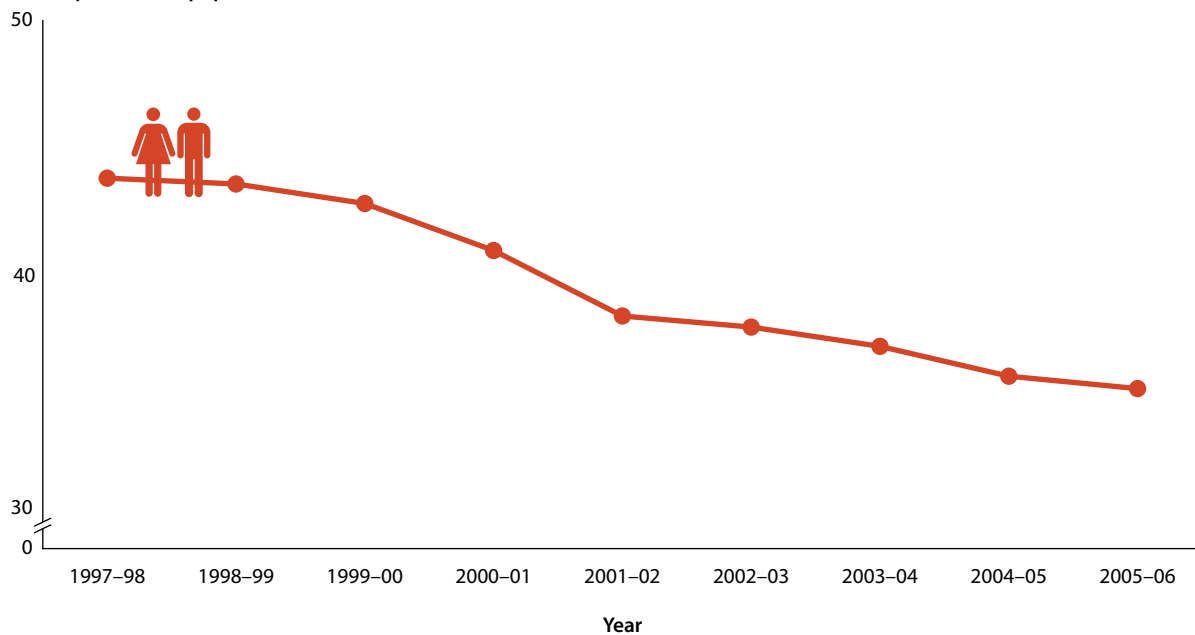
However, injury is still the commonest cause of death up to middle age. For those aged 65 years and over, the injury death rate in 2005–06 was similar to that of a decade before.

Find out more:

Australia's health 2010
Chapter 4

Injury deaths: trend

Deaths per 100,000 population



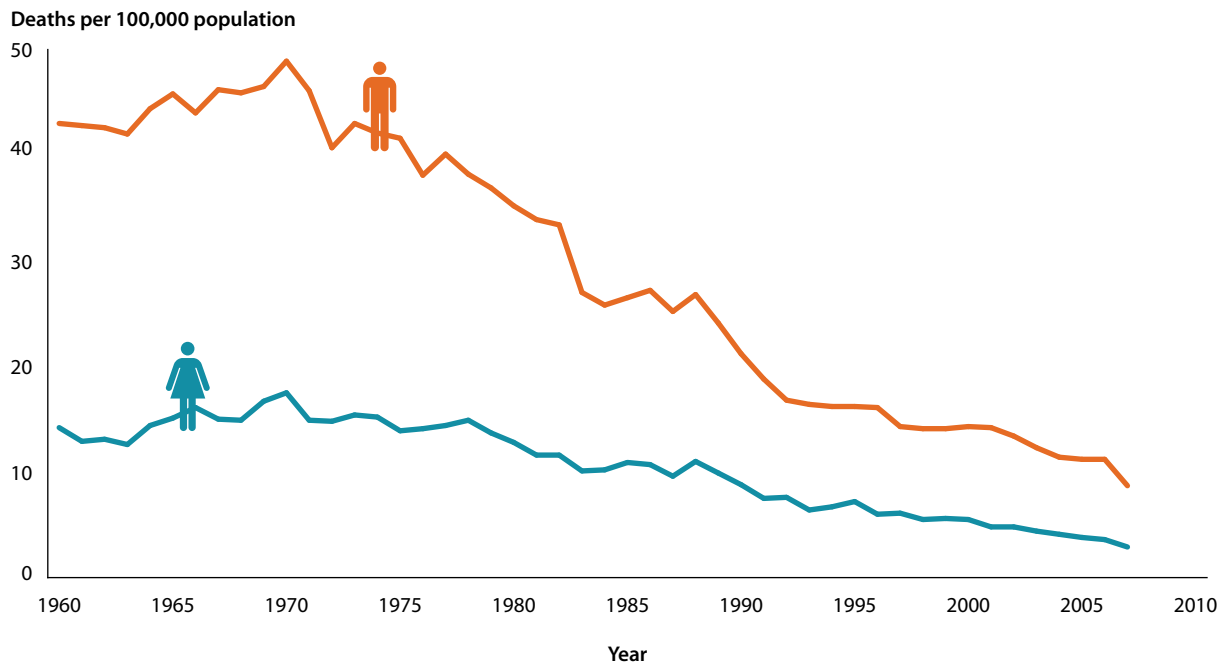
Traffic deaths down

Although still a major part of the injury toll, the death rate due to motor vehicle crashes in 2005 was nearly 80% lower than the historic peak reached around 1970, when major traffic safety measures began. The decline has occurred for both sexes, although the rate among males remains much higher than that for females.

Find out more:

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Motor vehicle crash deaths: trends



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